

AFRICAN PENTECOSTALISM AND THE ANCESTORS: CONFRONTATION OR COMPROMISE?

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Introduction

Much of the information presented in this paper was gathered during field research in Soshanguve, Pretoria between 1990 and 1992. The research consisted of a preliminary quantitative survey conducted between October 1990 and April 1991 in which 1638 families were interviewed. Since that time, in-depth interviews with members of defined churches has formed the basis of the qualitative research that is reflected in this paper. This discussion of traditional religious concepts is based on these conversations with church members, people who professed to be Christians: 92,4% of the population of Soshanguve were members of Christian churches (Anderson 1992a:64). In my publication, *BAZALWANE: African Pentecostals in South Africa* (Anderson 1992a), the research was described and some of the preliminary results tabulated. There I also defined the terms I shall be using here (1992a:7-12).

The term 'African Pentecostalism' is used very broadly to include in the first place 'Pentecostal mission churches', churches started by white Pentecostal missionaries in the early twentieth century and still generally under white influence or domination, the largest being the Apostolic Faith Mission and the Assemblies of God. Secondly, the term includes 'independent Pentecostal churches', independent black churches founded by Blacks within the last twenty years, an example being the Grace Bible Church in Soweto. Thirdly, I suggested that 'African Pentecostalism' should also include 'indigenous Pentecostal-type churches', numerically the most significant, referring to those African indigenous churches who have historical, theological and liturgical links with the Pentecostal movement (Anderson 1992a:28-31), and who, like the Pentecostals, emphasise the power and manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the church. Examples of these churches are the Zion Christian Church (hereafter ZCC) and the Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission. We identified 145 of these churches in Soshanguve (Anderson 1992a:122-125), accounting for about 32% of the population. Taken together, the African Pentecostals accounted for some 41% of the black population, a proportion that appears to be steadily rising, to such an extent that it has become '*the* major force to be reckoned with in South African Christianity' (Anderson 1992b:253).

For the purposes of understanding how this central traditional concept is dealt with in African Pentecostal churches, it is necessary first to grasp something of how ancestors are perceived in Africa.[1]

Ancestors and their veneration

The ancestors are believed to be those who have died, who exist in some usually undefined and unknown place to which the living have no access. There they look after their descendants' welfare, and expect their cooperation in return. They have power to both help and harm their wards - although most people in our research believed that the ancestors' function was to help and **not** to harm their families. Several of our respondents felt quite strongly that the ancestors never harm their wards; they are only there to help them and protect them. They only passively bring harm, by withdrawing their protection when their instructions have not been carried out. The ancestor cult is a family affair; and members of a particular family usually observe the family customs relating to their particular ancestors, at least once annually. Not every deceased family member becomes an ancestor. One man told us that ancestors are only those who are especially chosen to belong to the group of ancestors. Both his parents had died; but only his mother was an ancestor. He knew this because she was the only one who appeared to the family.

Ancestors reveal themselves mostly through dreams, but also less frequently through (day) visions and through diviners. One respondent, in an interesting example of 'cultural schizophrenia', said that when the ancestors appeared to him in dreams it was 'as clear as television', and not like an 'ordinary dream'. It seems that a manifestation of an ancestor will be an unusually vivid dream. Ancestors will usually identify themselves in some way, either by stating their name in the dream, or by showing some characteristic which will enable someone who remembers them to identify them. One respondent said that in 1986 she had a dream in which she saw she was pregnant. Someone took her to a big stone (probably a gravestone) on which was written the name 'Isaac'. The following day she enquired from an older family member, who said that Isaac was a grandfather who had died many years previously. A month later the respondent fell pregnant, and a baby boy was born who she had to call Isaac. She then prayed and thanked the ancestors for their gift of the child. The child thereby, following traditional custom, received the 'ancestor spirit' of the deceased ancestor Isaac.

Ancestors can be angered, and thereby can bring calamity to their descendants, especially when their instructions are not carried out. Because they are 'parents', they have the responsibility to discipline their 'children' when they are disobedient. One respondent in our survey told us that when his cousin was knocked down by a motor vehicle, the family visited a diviner to discover the reason for this disaster. They were told that the cousin had not carried out the 'rules' of the ancestors as revealed in a dream, and that this was why the accident had occurred. Similarly, another informant said that a diviner had told his brother that the ancestors wanted to kill him for failing to carry out their instructions. He was indeed thereafter knocked down by a car and killed. The informant, a ZCC member, fervently believed that the ancestors had the power to kill people, their children, or their livestock, when they were not obeyed.

The ancestors were responsible for the violence that had swept South Africa, said one informant, for they were angry that they were being neglected or ignored by the young people. She said that in the 'old days' when the ancestors were properly respected there was no killing. Several respondents referred to the visit of Mr Nelson Mandela to his ancestral home in the Transkei after he was released from prison in 1990. The fact that he had supposedly paid homage to his ancestors was the reason why things were going so well for him, and his 'power' was increasing. This is how one respondent put it:

When Mr Nelson Mandela was released from prison, he went back to his birth place to tell the ancestors that he was released from prison, and was now on a mission to liberate our country. All the blessings and the changes which are coming to us with him are because the ancestors are backing him and helping him.

One ZCC respondent alluded to the prosperity that is brought to people who respect the ancestors. When things were not going well in his life, he visited a prophet who told him that the ancestors were angry and should be appeased. The prophet thereupon slaughtered a chicken, prayed, and offered the bird to the ancestors. The respondent attributed his success since that time to that event, which had changed his life. He was now the owner of a shop and a car; and he no longer had 'family problems'. As a result he continued to do whatever the ancestors told him to do.

The ancestors must be appeased with gifts, such as the ritual killing of a cow, a goat or a chicken, a dish of porridge, the pouring out of a libation of sorghum beer, and other rituals as demanded by the ancestors themselves. Most people seemed to acknowledge that the ancestors did not actually consume the offering that was given them. One respondent had an interesting theory: when the meat was cooked or burnt, the smoke rose to heaven to become food for the ancestors. The ancestors' graves must be well looked after; and today it is very important to erect a tombstone in the departed's honour, for this will help to perpetuate the deceased's memory. People also speak with the ancestors at the graves, asking for help when they are troubled, and leaving behind a gift of food.

One man related two interesting incidents in his experience. His mother appeared to him in a dream some time after her death. She said that she was getting cold at the graveyard and needed her blanket. The family did not understand what this meant; so they went to ask a prophet. He told them that their mother needed a tombstone. They erected the tombstone, and the result was that the mother did not 'trouble' the family any longer. The second incident involved the man's maternal grandfather. After he died, the family had slaughtered a cow in his honour in keeping with traditional customs, and the people at the funeral had eaten it. Later he appeared in a dream asking where his blanket was. Once again, the family consulted the prophet, for they were members of an indigenous Apostolic church. This time the prophet said that the grandfather was looking for the hide of the cow slaughtered during his funeral. The problem was that the hide had by that time been destroyed. The man related how the grandfather continued to trouble the family with sickness and other difficulties. They decided to buy another cow, which they ritually killed, and then they put the skin in the room where the grandfather used to sleep. 'In that

way we satisfied him', the man concluded, 'and he did not trouble us any more'.

People are also sometimes instructed to go to the ancestors' graves and consult with them there. When all these various things are done it is believed that the offerer will live peacefully and will prosper. One respondent said that one day while she was sitting in the kitchen, she saw a white goat in a vision on the wall. She told her husband when he returned from work; and he said that it meant that they should kill a goat for the ancestors, which they did. Another respondent told of an occasion when her grandfather appeared to her. He came through the door of the room, and then stood next to her crying, saying that he was not satisfied with the family's behaviour towards him. The next morning she told her husband what had happened. At first he was somewhat sceptical; but he believed her when he received the same appearance during the following night. They had to make a ritual killing of a cow, and erect a tombstone for the grandfather. The respondent said that the grandfather was satisfied by this; for he had not appeared again since.

The importance of the ancestor cult

The ancestor cult is the central feature of African religion, the heart of the African spirit world. It is not an outmoded belief which is dying out in South Africa's urban areas. The veneration of ancestors is still widely practised in the black townships of South Africa; although the incidence of the ancestor cult among church members is not as high today as it was thirty years ago. Wherever we approached the subject of ancestors in Soshanguve, there was usually lively discussion. For a great many urban black people the ancestors are a reality, to be given due acknowledgement and to whom recourse is had for the provision of felt needs. Many respondents said that the ancestors were the benevolent guardians and protectors of people. One respondent said that even God was unable to do anything without the ancestors. Another said that a person could not pray to God without mentioning the ancestors; they were the mediators who would make the prayer successful. They were able to give a person power to pray to God.

The diviners, the specialists in traditional religion, will often direct the afflicted to the spirit world, instructing them to give attention to the ancestor cult in order to resolve their problems. Perhaps an ancestor feels neglected, and his surviving family has not fulfilled its traditional responsibilities. Usually the ancestor is viewed as nearer to God than living relatives are. One respondent told us that the ancestors were mediators between people and God, that they were God's helpers, and that they reveal God's will to people. When people want to speak to God they should go through the ancestors, he said. Fundamentally, the supreme being is unpredictable and for the most part unknown, and no relationship exists with him. The ancestors, however, are known; and the strong community and family relationships are unaffected by death.

But the ancestors are not the ultimate solution for the traditional African. It seems (at least from my theological perspective) that they tend to be unreliable; malignant, unpredictable and fickle - although in the perceptions of many Africans the ancestors are also caring, protective and concerned. They can

demand more than people are willing to give, or else they do not always make their desires clearly known. Sometimes adversity will suddenly strike a family, and they will need to know **which** particular ancestor or other living person caused that adversity, and why. The answers to these perplexing questions are paramount, since without them the adversity will not go away. The family needs to know what it must do to appease the offended ancestor. This is when they will turn to the diviners for solutions to these and other vexing questions.

Both Daneel (1973:54) in Zimbabwe and Pauw (1975:205) in the Eastern Cape demonstrated the strong support for the ancestor cult among African people belonging to mission churches in the communities they surveyed. There is some indication that this support has waned to a certain extent since these surveys were conducted in the 1960s. In our research the belief in the ancestor cult was held by a little less than half (44%) of our 1638 preliminary survey respondents, which was, nevertheless, a significant proportion.

Pentecostals and the ancestor cult

Members of urban Pentecostal mission churches and independent Pentecostal churches (constituting 9% of the total population) were generally unqualified and unanimous in their rejection of the ancestor cult and all the rituals associated with it. The ancestors are believed to exist, but Christians do not need to do anything about them or to make ritual killings for them, because they have no power over Christians. All but five of the 140 Pentecostals interviewed in our preliminary survey (97%) said that they were opposed to the practice of ritual killing. 132 (95%) said that they did not reverence the ancestors; and 134 (96%) said that they did not consult diviners. This indicates that it is the only grouping of black churches in South Africa which has almost totally rejected these traditional religious practices. It displays a radical break with what they regard as 'pagan' practices. Pentecostals were quite sure that a person who is 'saved' does not do these things. They represent the 'old life' out of which everything has become new. In this respect there is a marked contrast to most other types of church in Soshanguve. Pentecostals are more forthright in their rejection of those traditional practices which they see as incompatible with their Christianity, than the members of other church types are. Our research indicated that only 4% of the Pentecostals interviewed practised the ancestor cult in any way, compared to 43% in the mission churches, 54% in the indigenous Pentecostal-type churches, and 68% in the indigenous Ethiopian-type churches.^[ii]

These figures suggest that the gap between members of Pentecostal churches and members of indigenous Pentecostal-type churches is wider than it appears on the surface. Western Christianity has definitely influenced the Pentecostals in a much greater way. The Pentecostal-type church members, who are less doctrine oriented and less inhibited to discuss ancestors than Pentecostals are, have a greater awareness of the African spirit world and therefore may be making a greater contribution to contextualisation in this respect. A black theologian once said in a personal interview that in actual practice the Pentecostal rejection of the ancestor cult was ambivalent, and that it was very difficult for anyone to be disentangled from social practices connected with

the ancestor cult, without separating oneself from being an African. My impression is that many African Pentecostals have in fact done just that - and it is highly unlikely that they would admit to having denied their Africaness.

A well informed member of the Apostolic Faith Mission, obviously a sincere Christian who knew the Bible well, said the following:

I personally do not venerate the ancestors, but I believe that ancestors are there. Ancestors do exist; they are people who have fallen asleep. Before I was saved I used to venerate them; and I know what they can do in the life of a person. You really can become a slave of the ancestors. Even the Bible acknowledges that there are 'gods' and that we should not worship any other gods but our Father in heaven. They do have the power to help or harm you - that I saw when I was not yet saved... when I did what I was instructed, such as slaughtering a goat, then I saw things definitely improving. They have the power to harm you if you do not follow their instructions; and they have the power to help you if you follow them.... I believe that if people knew the power of the gospel they would not have anything to do with the ancestors. But because they are bound by the devil they are still in darkness. They go up and down buying goats, slaughtering cows - and nothing seems to come right. So if only people could know the power of the gospel and believe in Jesus Christ, they could be set free... now that they are still in darkness they must do as the devil commands them.

There seems to be ambiguity in the attitudes of some African Pentecostals to the ancestors. In the preceding interview, the ancestor cult was rejected. This practice belonged to the old life, to the darkness, to a person without Jesus Christ. But at the same time the ancestors were acknowledged as a reality. This respondent, however, seemed to equate the ancestors with the devil, for people needed to be set free from the darkness so that they would no longer obey the instructions of the devil. Another Apostolic Faith Mission member said that to have communication with the ancestors was against the Bible, which taught that there was to be no contact between the living and the dead. A member of the Full Gospel Church said that before she became a Christian, she would go to the graveyard whenever things were not going well. This is how she described her experience of ancestors:

I used to go to the graveyard and kneel there and speak to my ancestors asking for help. I would bring food so that they could eat and then rest. At that time I was ignorant of the fact that only God could save my life. I was lost like a blind woman, believing that there were ancestors. But now, since I am saved, I have nothing to do with these ancestors, and I do not believe in them any more.

Many Pentecostals identified ancestors as demonic. A member of an independent Pentecostal church said bluntly that ancestors were 'evil spirits'. 'The devil is able to disguise himself in the form of a person who died long ago,' he explained. 'He pretends as if he has come to help and protect you, while all the time the ancestor is the devil himself'. Another Pentecostal woman said that although ancestors existed, they were 'idols'. She thought that the ancestors were unfair, because they helped or harmed a person at will without warning. A member of the Apostolic Faith Mission said that she did not believe in ancestors, because they were in fact evil spirits. The wife of an independent Pentecostal pastor said: 'Ancestors are evil spirits. Satan is able to

change these spirits so that they resemble your parents who have died. He will tell you, "These are your parents", and you will believe that." Similarly, a member of an independent Pentecostal church said: 'Ancestors are evil spirits that come in the form of our grandparents. This is the devil's trick so that we can worship them instead of worshipping God. They help some, and make many others suffer'.

Another Pentecostal was also opposed to the ancestor cult:

Ancestors are our forefathers who are asleep; they will wake up one day. We should honour our parents while they are still alive, not after they have died. They manifest themselves through demons, and through the diviners who will tell you that your ancestor is instructing you to do this or that.

The general reaction of Pentecostal people to the questions on ancestors, therefore, was that ancestors were powerless in Christians' lives, and that they were evil spirits who should be rejected.

The ancestor cult and indigenous churches

As far as the indigenous Pentecostal-type churches are concerned, there generally appears to be more ambiguity than there is in the case of Pentecostals. In these churches there is a wide spectrum of opinion regarding the ancestors. Sometimes there was evidence of confrontation between a person's Christian faith and the ancestor cult. We came across outright rejection of the ancestors on the part of some Pentecostal-type members. Like many Pentecostals, they said forthrightly that the so-called ancestors were 'demons'. The Bible said that we should not worship or obey them, they said. One respondent, a member of the Philippian Apostolic Church in Zion said that although she could attend any church service, she would definitely not go to a church 'where ancestors are worshipped'. But at the same time, several respondents also said that people were free to believe in ancestors and to observe the ancestor rituals if they chose to. Many Pentecostal-type church members said that they did not believe in ancestors, that the ancestors had no powers; and some said that ancestors were demons. A member of the Christian Apostolic Church in Zion, for example, had a similar opinion to those of the Pentecostals noted above when he said: 'Ancestors are the spirits of Satan who come in the form of one of our dead parents'. Two different Pentecostal-type church respondents said, with irony, that it was pointless slaughtering animals for the ancestors, as they were dead and could not eat the meat - only the living could eat. A member of St Matthew's Apostolic Faith Church said that she believed in ancestors before she was 'saved'. She went on to say: 'They cannot harm a child of God. We do not need to do anything for them, because they are dead. They can only enslave a person'. We also came across several people, particularly younger members of these churches who clearly knew nothing at all (or very little) about the ancestor cult or about traditional religion generally. Some said they had never prayed or made ritual killings to ancestors in their lives, and they did not know whether ancestors could help

or harm people. Others said that they did not know whether the ancestors existed; they had merely heard other people talk about them. Some said that this did not concern them at all, for they knew that God was the only one who could really help them when in trouble. In this respect, we must remember that even traditionally, the youth are excluded from ritual participation. As they grow older, and are included in traditional observations, they begin to assimilate traditional religious values. This may also be a reason for the ignorance of some young people concerning ancestors.

We did not encounter the same strong support for the ancestor cult that has been described by other researchers (e.g. Pauw 1960:161; 1975:302; West 1975:37). And yet, many of the members of these churches were still practising ancestor rituals. One of the South African indigenous church leaders, Archbishop Mhlope of the Christian National Apostolic Church in Zion, said 'Whoever forsakes his ancestors is also forsaken by his ancestors and he becomes an easy prey to diseases and to all his other enemies' (ICT 1985:17-18). Elsewhere, the same document (1985:24) said that 'the customary way of commemorating and making contact with the spirits of our ancestors is a family affair, not a religious service... in most cases our leaders do encourage the commemoration of our ancestors in our homes'. West (1975:29) noted among some of the churches in Soweto that he surveyed that 'the question of the shades' was 'a personal matter for individuals, and of no importance to the church'. (This, in fact, is also often the view of African theologians.) Several of the prophet-healers interviewed by West admitted that their power came from God through the ancestors (:117). Makhubu (1988:60), an indigenous church leader, said that 'most of the African Independent Churches honour and respect ancestors. This is something that is deeply rooted in African people'. The Zulu Nazarite leader Shembe had also 'given a place to the ancestral spirits in his system of theology... In his church, the dead are entitled to veneration, and commemoration services are held in their honour' (Vilakazi 1986:76).

A few of the robed Apostolics in Soshanguve were in favour of the preservation of the ancestor cult. The Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission was one of the more accommodating churches to traditional practices that we found among Pentecostal-type churches generally. Over half of the members made ritual killings for the ancestors, and 76% of the members revered ancestors. One St John member said that it was important for people to pray to the ancestors, to keep their graves clean and watered, and to unveil tombstones in their honour. Other Apostolics were also favourably disposed to the ancestors, like the member of the Saviour Apostolic Church who said that ancestors could heal sicknesses which no-one else could heal. 'They bring good luck' she said. 'If you do not do what they want, you will be in trouble'. A member of the St Paul Apostolic Church said that people should make ritual killings to the ancestors, which was actually practised in her church. Another member of the same church said that people must do exactly what the ancestors said. A member of the St Paul Spiritual Church of God said that it was right to sacrifice for the ancestors, because people in the Bible used to make sacrifices. This was also the view of a member of the Christian Catholic Apostolic Holy Spirit Church in Zion. A member of the Apostolic Christian Church in Zion reflected the ambivalence in the minds of some church members, when she said that the Bible taught us that there should be no communication between the living and the dead. She went on to say that just as Nehemiah asked the king's permission to go and restore the tombstones of the Jewish forefathers, so we should honour our ancestors. Another member said that when his family went to the graveyard to pray, the ancestors helped his younger brother who had been sick. It was important to go to the grave with some snuff, or maize meal, or some other gift for the ancestors, he said, but that Christians should

not make ritual killings for them. It appears that for some members there is a qualified acceptance of ancestor veneration. In this last instance there was a desire to measure any practice against biblical norms.

Some respondents made attempts to provide theological justification for the observance of the ancestor cult, although the 'communion of the saints' idea of African theology did not feature at all in our interviews. One respondent told us that the ancestors revealed the Word of God to her, so that she could prophesy. Another informant said that the ancestors were angels who had embodied themselves in one of your relatives who had died. Another said that the ancestors were the great cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 12, who were looking at how people were living their lives. Whenever people did wrong things they were angry and disturbed. She gave Scriptural examples of the appearance of ancestors: when Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration, and when Samuel appeared to Saul when the latter visited the witch of Endor. People needed, therefore, to do what the ancestors instructed them to do.

Frederick Modise of the International Pentecost Church (Anderson 1992c:186-200) and his ministers officially confront the ancestor cult. This church (hereafter IPC) has effectively reduced dependence on ancestors in the lives of many of its members. In a service attended by our field worker in the IPC headquarters at Silo (Zuurbekom), Modise said that ancestors are an abomination to God; another preacher said that ancestors were 'angels of Satan'. Modise told me in a personal interview that he did not believe in what he called 'idols' and 'superstitions', referring not only to ancestors and traditional charms and medicines, but also to symbolic healing methods prescribed by ZCC and other indigenous Pentecostal-type church prophets and healers. This is also propagated in the church newsletter *Star of Silo*. In the first issue, a picture of Modise's house in Soweto is followed by a comment on what happened after his discharge from hospital in October 1962:

He removed from his house all medicine conventional or unconventional. All symbols related to traditional and ancestry [sic] worship were thrown out of the house. Idolatry [sic] symbols in the form of holy water, holy ash and strings were thrown out of the house. What he remained with was his trust, faith, hope and belief in his new found God and the world order and the civilization he had to implement.

In keeping with this official view, several different IPC members said that ancestors were the 'angels of Satan' and 'evil spirits'; they were no help to people at all, as their only function was to bring sickness and trouble, to harm and destroy. Another member said that he did not believe in the existence of ancestors, because ancestors were people who worked with diviners. Ancestors would only reveal themselves to those people who believed in them, he said, and this would be through the agency of the diviners. Another member said that the dead were resting; and that therefore the 'ancestors' were not ancestors at all, but were 'the devil's angels'. It was, however, clear that for some IPC members beliefs in the ancestors were still strong and unaffected by their church's official stance in this regard.

The Zion Christian Church and the ancestor cult

There has been a tendency among researchers to describe the ZCC in South Africa as accommodating the ancestor cult - although Daneel did not find this to be true of the ZCC in Zimbabwe. Lukhaimane (1980:51) said that the ZCC 'did not restrict its members from making sacrifices to their ancestors'. This comment was valid for some of the ZCC members we encountered, who felt that it was important to make ritual killings. A ZCC minister said that as the ancestors were mediators between people and God, they had to be obeyed. We should pray to the ancestors so that they could speak to God on our behalf, he said. He also said that the ancestral spirit that operated in a person could through baptism and prayer be converted into what he called a 'church spirit', or the Spirit of God. This is how he answered our question 'What are ancestors?':

Ancestors are people who have died - but this does not mean that they have ceased to exist. They still continue living in another world. Now they have more power than we have. They can see all things that are happening to us, because they are working very closely with God.... They are able to pray to God on our behalf, and the things we ask of them they present to God. I believe that they are people very much concerned about us and our lives.

Marie-Louise Martin (1975:141) reflected the views of earlier researchers who considered there to be confusion between the ancestors and the Holy Spirit in indigenous churches. Referring to the ZCC, she stated:

In such syncretistic groups the Spirit of God is confused, or identified, with the ancestral spirits, for both can manifest themselves through a certain specially-chosen medium and both can occasion ecstasy.

We did not, however, find such confusion between these two diametrically opposite concepts amongst the majority of ZCC members interviewed. In our survey, 73% of 168 ZCC members interviewed said that they did not make ritual killings for the ancestors. When the same 168 people were asked whether church members **reverence** the ancestors, 97 (58%) said that they did not, whilst 66 (39%) said that they did. The remaining 3% were uncertain. This figure shows more ambivalence; and our in-depth interviews with ZCC members showed that for many ZCC people the ancestors still play an important role.

And yet within the ZCC there are both extremes of opinion. Some ZCC members said that the ancestors were demons who had nothing to do with Christians, whilst others said that ancestors revealed themselves to the prophets, and must be respected. ZCC members in South Africa do not appear to universally confront the traditional beliefs about ancestors; although they seem to have little need for ancestral rituals. The reason for this is mainly because the church, and especially the prophetic therapy and prescriptions, provide the protection and guidance formerly sought from the ancestors. Some ZCC members told us that ZCC people did not venerate the ancestors at all; but this opinion was by no means unanimous. The research in Soshanguve shows that

ZCC members are less in favour of the ancestor cult (39%) than are Pentecostal-type church members generally (52%), and than the overall population of the township (43%). This indicates a preference for confrontation with the ancestor cult among the majority of ZCC members (Anderson 1992c:251).

These findings do not suggest that the ZCC is a syncretistic church, or one that does not effectively deal with traditional beliefs conflicting with the Christian revelation. For many ZCC members this was not true at all. Several members we interviewed said that they did not believe that it was right to observe ancestor rituals; some said they did not need them. One ZCC woman said that she did not believe in ancestors; her late mother had said that whatever she wanted to do for her she should do while she was alive and not after she had died. Another member said that as her parents who had passed away were Christians, and did not reverence the ancestors, then there was no reason for her family to do so today. As far as she was concerned, the ancestors did not exist. Although a much higher proportion of ZCC members are positive about traditional practices than is the case with the Pentecostal churches, they were still a minority. We have evidence of a rejection by the ZCC of traditional practices that was also true of Pentecostal-type churches (including the ZCC) in Zimbabwe (Daneel 1987:262) - although there it seems to have been a sharper confrontation. The reason for this may have something to do with the fact that indigenous churches in Zimbabwe were more directly influenced by evangelical mission churches than they were in South Africa.

In my earlier book, *Moya: the Holy Spirit in an African context* (Anderson 1991:87) I suggested that for many Pentecostal-type churches contact with the ancestors is rejected, while for others there is a far more tolerant and ambivalent attitude to the ancestor cult. This latter attitude does not seem to be true of most ZCC members. Our research shows that the majority of the members of this church reject ancestor veneration by Christians.

Christian responses to ancestors

Generalisations about the beliefs and attitudes of the African Pentecostal churches with regard to ancestors must not give the impression of finality and conclusiveness, especially when dealing with such a dynamic and constantly changing church movement. It is clearly important for Christians who want to be relevant in Africa to respond somehow to the objective reality of ancestors, traditionally believed to be the guardians and protectors of their surviving families, and still revered by many urban Blacks in South Africa. We have seen that the African Pentecostal churches have responded to the reality of the ancestor cult in two contrasting and antithetical ways.

The most frequent response is that of confrontation. The weight of evidence of this research points to the fact that for most members of these churches the ancestor cult is rejected. Ancestors do appear to Christians, but their response as believers is usually to reject the 'visitation'. The 'ancestors', they believe, are not ancestors at all, but are demon spirits which need to be confronted and exorcised or idols which need to be spurned - for they only lead to further

misery and bondage. They have no power over Christians, because Christians have the greater power of the Holy Spirit within them, which overcomes all of Satan's power. This belief was most strongly found among members of Pentecostal mission and independent churches; but it was also prominent in indigenous Pentecostal-type churches.

The findings of this research confirm Daneel's (1971:462) earlier research in Zimbabwe, where 'from the outset the leaders of the prophetic movements launched an attack on all forms of ancestor "worship"'. He said that the Shona Zionists 'consistently regard heathen *midzimu* (ancestors) as 'evil spirits' (*mweya yakaipa*) from whom they must break away' (1987:233). The orientation towards the traditional world view is exhibited by the prophets diagnosing sicknesses and other problems as caused by ancestors or sorcery. But in contrast to the traditional diviner, as Daneel (1987:261) has pointed out, instead of accommodating the ancestor,

...The spirit is branded a demon ... its claims on the patient - especially if these involve ancestor worship - are rejected and the spirit is exorcised. Here the Holy Spirit and the ancestor spirit are usually diametrically opposed and it is a matter of confrontation rather than identification.

In this research among urban African Pentecostals in Soshanguve there was almost unqualified rejection of all forms of ancestor rituals, as I have indicated above.

But there was also a second and opposite response, a view mainly held by some members of Pentecostal-type churches. This was one of accommodation and compromise. For a significant minority in these churches, the ancestors still played an important role, and they were to be respected and obeyed. They were seen as the mediators of God, who sometimes revealed the will of God to people, and who sometimes inspired the prophets. Whether seen as angels, witnesses in heaven, or mediators between people and God, the traditional function of the ancestors as the protectors and benefactors of their progeny was preserved by those who held this view. This more tolerant and ambivalent attitude to the ancestors confirms what other researchers have found.

It must not be thought, however, that this was the predominant reaction to the ancestor cult among members of these churches. On the contrary, this research tends to establish the findings of other researchers; notably Daneel (1987:262) in Zimbabwe, that we have evidence of a Spirit-inspired confrontation with the ancestor cult which has replaced the traditional beliefs with a truly Christian alternative. The fact that most of our interviewees had a clear understanding of the Holy Spirit and were opposed to the practice of the ancestor cult by Christians, tends to negate the views of earlier researchers that the ancestor cult had found new expression in the emphasis on pneumatological beliefs and manifestations in African Pentecostalism. These views were mostly based on European theological presuppositions that could not really be substantiated by empirical research. The fact that the Holy Spirit has taken over some (or all) of the **functions** of the ancestor does not mean that he has thereby **become** the ancestor. It means rather that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has become

relevant in this very important African context, and that the Spirit has become the Counsellor and Guide as portrayed in the Scriptures. Far from being a resurgence of traditional ancestor spirit possession, once we have separated the forms of the Spirit phenomena from their meaning, the revelations of the Holy Spirit in African Pentecostalism point to a realistic encounter and confrontation between the new Christian faith and the old traditional beliefs. Christianity thereby attains an authentically African character, realistically penetrating the old and creating the new.

Western theology has generally not satisfied the African yearning to be protected from the evil forces that are existentially felt. The 'gospel' has been impoverished because the Spirit of God has not been allowed to fill the void left after the Christian message has confronted the ancestors. Thus, injustice has been done to the African Pentecostal churches who have attempted to provide a solution to this emptiness, by criticising their methods because they do not fit nicely into Western theological categories.

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[i]. The term 'ancestor' is used rather than 'ancestral spirit', because Africans do not usually speak of the ancestors as 'spirits'. The latter term is only used to differentiate between the ancestors revealing themselves alone, and the 'ancestral spirit' which possesses certain people, enabling them to declare the will of the ancestors and to have extraordinary powers as diviners.

[ii]. Bengt Sundkler (1961:53) was the first to differentiate between 'Ethiopian' type and 'Zionist' type churches. The Ethiopian-type comprises churches not necessarily named 'Ethiopian', which originated in a secession from white churches on racial grounds. They were formed as 'a reaction against the White mission's conquest of the African peoples'; and yet their 'church organization and Bible interpretation are largely copied from the patterns of the Protestant Mission Churches from which they have seceded' (:54). In my work, the term 'Pentecostal-type' is used in preference to Sundkler's 'Zion-type' and Daneel's (1971:285) 'Spirit-type' churches.